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CONSERVATION OF
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IN INDIA

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^C PRESERVATION
OF
LEARNED TRADITION IN INDIA

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Preface

Preservation of Learned Tradition in India attempts to set forth a connected account as to how learning and literature of India were preserved from ancient times. While reading for the Diploma in Librarianship of the University of Bombay I was partially introduced to this topic. The literature available rather whetted my appetite. When I became free from regular class studies I pursued the topic and found it not only instructive but also fascinating. The one defect was that the information lay scattered in a number of forbidding books. I have culled it together in this brochure in the hope that it will interest and instruct not only would-be Librarians but also general readers.

It is regretted that owing to lack of type diacritical marks had to be omitted.

Khar

Bombay 21

May, 1950

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Memory and Ingenuity

The collections of hymns called the Vedas, which form the oldest and the most important work of Indian literature were composed while the Aryan people still occupied territories on both sides of the Indus. The composition of the hymns of the Rgveda, the earliest of these collections, took place some time between 2500 and 1500 B.C. These vedic hymns have been preserved unchanged for over 3000 years even though writing was unknown in India before 500 B.C. In the whole of Vedic literature there is no reference to writing. Though in the Tripitaka, collection of sacred canons of Buddhism, which was completed by about 400 B.C., we find some evidence which proves a knowledge of writing, there is no reference to manuscripts nor to the reading or copying of sacred texts. The first evidence of extensive writing is to be found in the reign of the Buddhist king Asoka (274-237 B.C.), the grandson of Chandragupta,

who caused religious edicts to be inscribed upon rocks and pillars in several parts of his vast kingdom. Yet there is no evidence of books, manuscripts or of any part of the learned tradition having been committed to writing. Thus even when writing was known in this country it was not used for literary purposes for a long time. From literary evidence it appears that the Vedas were first committed to writing some time in the eighth or the ninth century A.D.¹ We have therefore a gap of some 2500 to 3000 years between the composition of the Vedas—the oldest strata of Indian literature—and their reduction to writing. How the Vedic and other early literature was preserved during this long interval is an interesting story in the history of human civilization.

Before considering this, another question has to be answered and that relates to the nature or the kind of literature that was preserved from about 2500 B.C. to the 11th century A.D. The most ancient or the Vedic literature is a collection of hymns mainly sacrificial and religious and only partially secular in intent and content. It was meant

for being sung at the time of sacrifices. Yet even when it ceased to be used for sacrifices it was lovingly kept up. The literature belonging to the later Vedic period was ritualistic and theosophic like the Brahmanas and the Upanisads.

The early post-Vedic period from about 900 B.C. to 100 A.D. witnessed some very important developments in the history of Indian literature. At this time were composed the Vedangas, the three classes of Sutras and Panini's grammar and Patanjali's great commentary thereon. It was found necessary to treat the Vedas in various aspects in order to make them intelligible, as well as to apply them to their appropriate purposes and to continue them to be properly handed down. Thus grew up the six branches of Vedic science called Vedangas i.e. members or limbs of the Vedas. The effective handing down of the Vedas was helped by science of phonetics and systematic study of the construction of metres. The two branches were known as the Siksa and the Chhandas, the Paniniya siksa and Chhandah-sutra being the two important works in the two branches respectively. The

correct interpretation of the text required a study of grammar as well as of etymology. Panini's famous grammar and Yaska's Nirukta are the important works dealing with the two aspects of the Veda, Vyakarana or grammar and Nirukta or etymology. The application of the hymns in order to be effective must be absolutely correct. The two branches of knowledge Kalpa or ceremonial and Jyotisa or astronomy, treating of the time, the place, the particular rite and the specific occasion therein when a particular hymn could be appropriately utilized made this possible. Siksa, Vyakarana and Nirukta taken together form the science of Linguistics; Jyotisa is mathematics and astronomy; Chhandas is the analytical study of metrics. Kalpa is ritualistic. These were the six limbs of the Vedas and hence were known as Vedangas.

The Sutras are concise works in which the religion of the Brahmins on its ritual side is condensed with a view to preserving the ancient sacred literature. During this period Buddhism and Jainism rose in India. Pali language became the vehicle of Buddhist canons. These canons when collected came to be

known as the Tripitaka. The Dhammapada and the Jatakas are the other important Buddhist works. The aggregate of the sacred books or canon of the Jains came to be known as Siddhanta or Agama.

To the period from the first to the eleventh century A.D. belong the epic and the classical literature. The two great epics, the Mahabharata and Ramayana, in the form in which they have come down to us belong to about the 2nd century A.D. They are the great masterpieces of Itihasa or history. Kalidasa and other famous classical poets flourished from the second century to the eighth century A. D. The earliest preserved poetry of this period is the Buddha-charita by the poet Asvaghosa. It belongs to the end of the second century A.D. Kalidasa, the most famous poet and dramatist of India, flourished about the fourth century A. D. He composed two court epics the Raghu-vamsa or "Race of Raghu," which celebrates the ancestry and deeds of Rama, and the Kumara-sambhava or "the Birth of (the war-god) Kumara". Kalidasa also composed two lyrics, Meghaduta or "cloud messenger" and Ritusamhara or collection of seasons"

and three dramas Sakuntala, Vikramorvasiya and Malavikagnimitra. Other famous poetic works are: Kiratarjuniya or fight between the Pandava prince Arjuna and god Siva in the guise of a Kirata or wild mountaineer, a poem by poet Bharavi who lived not later than the sixth century A. D.; Bhatti-Kavya an artificial epic ascribed to the poet Bhartrhari who died in 651 A.D.; Sisupala-Vadha or "slaying of Sisupala" by the poet Magha and Raghavapandaviya, an epic composed about 800 A. D. by a poet named Kaviraja.

The Sanskrit plays that have come down to us are assigned to a period after the 2nd century A.D. Thirteen plays are attributed to Bhasa who lived about the third century A.D. Three plays of Kalidasa who belonged to the fourth century have been already mentioned. A drama entitled Mrcchakatika or "little clay cart" is attributed to king Sudraka of an age not far removed from Kalidasa. There are two plays Ratnavali or "the pearl necklace" and Nagananda or "joy of the serpent" by the Buddhist king Harsha (606-48 A.D.). Three great plays viz. Malatimadhava, or 'Malati and Madhava', Mahavira-

carita or "life of the great hero" and Uttara-Ramacharita or "later life of Rama" are the works of another noted dramatist Bhavabhuti, who lived in the first half of the 8th century A.D. Another wellknown play is Venisamhara or "binding up of the braid of hair" by Bhatta-Narayana who lived before 800 A.D. Not later than 800 A.D. was written a play of unique type Mudraraksasa or "Raksasa (the minister) with the signet", embodying historical events of far off days. About 900 A.D. there was another addition to Indian literature in the plays of Rajasekhara. They are Balaramayana, Balabharata and Viddhasala-bhanjika. His Karpura-manjari is one of the best comedies of Indian literature written in Prakrit. Prabodha-chandrodaya "the moon-rise of intelligence" a play by Krishnamisra, a remarkable product of Indian literature based on fairly recent historical events, is dated about 1100 A.D.

One wonders at the variety of the literature and the wonder is greater when one takes into consideration the extent of the Rgveda, the Brahmanas, the epics and the Puranas, contents of which have been already pointed out,

and of the grammatical philosophical and 'dharmic' literature that was produced from about the 9th century B. C. to about the 17th century A. D.

The Rgveda consists of 1028 hymns. Each hymn itself consists of more than 10 verses. Thus the whole Rgveda consists of 10600 verses.² The Mahabharata "consists of upwards of 100,000 couplets—its contents thus being nearly eight times the bulk of the Iliad and the Odyssey combined".³ The Ramayana which consists of some 2400 slokas,⁴ thus not equally voluminous, is yet much larger in extent than the Iliad, one of world's greatest epics. The Puranas which were completed by about 600 A. D. are eighteen in number, each volume being nearly as big as the Ramayana. Together they consist of 400,000 couplets.

The intellectual activity of the Hindus in the field of Linguistics was a growing one and spread over about 2500 years. It culminated in Panini's Astadhyayi, consisting of eight lectures (adhyaya) of four 'padas'. The whole consists of about 4,000 short aphorisms.⁵ "The whole book is dominated

by the aim to be as brief as possible".⁶ This authoritative text on grammar was produced towards the end of the 6th century B. C. Even though Panini produced a classic, adapted to fairly easy memorizing, a succession of able scholars went on introducing modifications. An important work in the field is Vartika, which is a large collection of concise critical rules, by Katyayana, assigned to the third century B.C. Patanjali about 150 B.C., i.e. about three hundred and fifty years after the great master, produced another masterpiece in that science, namely his Maha-bhasya, in the medium of prose. Other works on grammar and commentaries on these continued to be produced till the 17th or the 18th century A. D. Thus there was considerable extent of grammatical literature which was produced from about the 6th century B. C. to about the 17th or 18th century A. D.

In the domain of philosophy continuity of intellectual activity is even longer, considering only the great classics of that subject. The activity as reflected in the Upanisads may be dated about the 9th century B. C., though even earlier speculations are known. From

them, through Badarayana, Gautama, Kanada, Kapila and other authors, dating from about the 3rd century B.C., to the great exponent of the idealist school, Sankaracarya, and his master-piece, the Sarirabhasya, of about the 8th century A.D., there is a regular succession of high philosophical thought, which does not exhaust the entire contribution of the Hindu mind.

There is a vast number of treatises on Dharma-sastra or sacred law, usually called Smṛti or "recollection, tradition", as opposed to Śruti or "revelation". About forty metrical Smṛtis are known to exist.⁷ Such law-books were produced in vast number over a long period of time, from the 1st century B. C. to the 17th century A. D. The most important of such works, the Manavadharmasastra or the Manusmṛti, a work of about the 3rd century A. D. treats of sacred law. It comprises 2684 verses.⁸ Next in importance is the Yajñavalkya Dharmasastra which consists of three books, treating of rules of social conduct, civil and criminal law and penance or expiation. A more practical work is the Nāradya Dharmasastra which is strictly con-

fined to law. In addition to these there are vast number of treatises on special points of law. These law-books with their commentaries are a world of literature by itself.

Such was the stupendous mass of literature. And most of it was produced before writing came to be employed for copying the texts.

All this vast mass was preserved, for a long period, entirely through memory and by oral tradition. Several factors contributed to and aided this way of preservation of the learned tradition. The ancient Indian people felt deep concern for the preservation of literary tradition; and it was the sacred duty of one class of people in society, the Brahmins, not only to study all that but to transmit and preserve it unaltered. A part of the literature had to be learnt by every person of the first three classes of society. The Brahmins were not merely preserving the ancient literature but some of them were making additions by their own contributions which were again in their turn being preserved and handed down.

The ancient Indian system of education was eminently suitable for handing down

orally and preserving the learned tradition. Indeed one of the fundamental aspects of that system of education, which distinguishes it from the modern system of education, is its complete independence of external aids like the art of writing. Even when the art of writing was developed in this country, for some time it was not used for the purposes of instruction. The method of teaching was purely oral and that was the only authoritative system before and long after the introduction of writing. In this system the teacher passes on orally to the student the tradition he had himself received and this means learning the texts by heart. The ideal before the teacher was to hand down to the student the exact contents of the texts and then to expound them in the traditional manner.

In ancient times in the absence of organised educational institutions the family played a great part in the educational system, the father being the usual teacher. There are several examples in the Vedic and Upanisadic literature of fathers teaching their sons, the method of teaching being oral. It consisted of the sons repeating the hymns and ritual

lore over and over again after the father had spoken out the text bit by bit, until all was committed to memory. As time passed and as there was greater specialization and elaboration it became a practice to send the boys to the house of a teacher. The sacred law laid down that immediately after his 'Upanayana' at about the age of 8 or 10 the student should go to the house of the teacher. Upanayana, when rendered into English as "thread ceremony", does not really convey its original significance. The term 'Upanayana' means leading towards and thus denotes the student's approach to the teacher for the purpose of getting instruction. For complete mastery, a student was required to spend twelve to twenty-four years for learning the texts by this method. This system of education, known as the Gurukula system, continued till about the early centuries of the Christian era, when organised educational institutions came to be evolved. Then came into existence the Hindu temple colleges and Buddhist monastic universities. Even then the private teacher continued to play a notable part in the educational system.

Social ideas and ideals helped preservation of learned tradition in an age in which writing was not known or was not used for the purpose. Obedience to parents was insisted on. Elders and teachers were to be respected, and reverence was to be shown towards literary geniuses of the past. The rule of Svadhyaya required daily recitation of a part of what was learnt as a student. According to the duty of "rsitarpana" reverence was to be shown to the literary geniuses of the past at the time of the morning prayers.⁹ Such social customs proved rather efficacious as methods for preserving the learned tradition.

Since the Vedic times people believed in a theory, known as the theory of three debts.¹⁰ According to this theory, an individual owes three debts which must be repaid by fulfilling certain duties. Firstly, there is the debt to gods which can be discharged by learning to perform sacrifices and by making them regularly. Thus the religious literature, which formed a large part of the ancient Indian literature, was preserved because of its integral position in Hindu theory of life. Then secondly, there is debt to the "rsis", sages

and literary geniuses of the past, which can be liquidated by a study of their works and by continuing their literary tradition. Thus the best literary traditions were maintained. Thirdly, a person owes debt to the ancestors, which can be discharged by raising progeny and giving to it proper education, which consisted in learning orally, firstly from the father and then from the mouth of the teacher.¹¹ Thus oral teaching and learning became a compulsory religious duty or a custom, serving to preserve the learned traditions.

The ancients, who felt deep concern for the preservation of learning, may have adopted this method of oral teaching in the absence of a script, yet the adoption of this method and its continuance even after the introduction of writing had special reasons, or was due to some theories in which the ancients believed. According to Hindu belief the 'ṛsis' knew the Vedic hymns by internal inspiration, in other words they were Srutis, that is, were heard by the sages, and were best learnt from the teacher orally, the receptor fixing it in his memory through recitation. That the Sruti or the Veda had to be thus learnt is a point elabor-

ated by Kumarila Bhatta who flourished about the 7th or the 8th century A.D. He observes: "The Veda is distinctly to be perceived by means of the senses...learn it and remember it and thus hand it on to others".¹² It is very interesting, and also instructive, to note that this view of learning the Veda was emphasized again by the great Vedic commentator Sayana, who lived about six centuries later, when writing had not only become a regular practice but also had split up into a dozen scripts. He says: "The text of the Veda is to be learnt by the method of learning it from the lips of the teacher."¹³ It should appeal to the ear and not to the eye and therefore it was not to be reduced to writing. This sentiment determined the method by which learning had to be acquired and preserved.

Memorizing was undoubtedly greatly insisted on, and certain wonderful arrangements or different forms of the sacred texts were devised such as would aid memory in preserving and handing down the texts in their pure and original forms, and would ensure against changes in later ages. Suitable mechanical

methods were invented for memorizing the vast literary matter. The aim of these methods was different arrangements of the words of the text, each such arrangement being known by a distinct name. In the 'pada-patha' or word-text, the words were recited in their natural order, compounds being separated into their elements. In the second arrangement, the 'krama-patha' or step-text, every word of the 'pada-patha' appears twice in the following order: 1, 2; 2, 3; 3, 4 etc. joined together by Sandhi. Then there is the 'jata' arrangement in which the order of words is 1, 2, 2, 1, 1, 2; 2, 3, 3, 2, 2, 3 etc. In the 'ghana' arrangement the order is 1, 2, 2, 1, 1, 2, 3, 3, 2, 1, 1, 2, 3; 2, 3, 3, 2, 2, 3, 4, 4, 3, 2, 2, 3; etc. The compounds are dissolved. The object of these different arrangements is simply the most accurate preservation of the words of the sacred text.

The elaborate scheme of the Vedic text proved efficacious in preserving the purity of the original text to such an extent that Max Muller remarks "the texts of the Veda have been handed down to us with such accuracy that there is hardly a variant reading in the

proper sense of the word, or even an uncertain accent in the whole of the Rigveda.”¹³

As in the course of time the literature thus to be mastered by the student increased in bulk and complexity while its recitability was nothing like that of the Vedic text it was felt necessary to condense it into some convenient form. For this the Sutra form, which is a triumph in aids to memorizing, was devised. The finished product of this activity is the Astadhyayi of Panini. It is a very scientific and complete grammar of Sanskrit language given in short aphorisms, which lend themselves to memorizing.

The urgent need to memorize all learned tradition and the sentiment created in favour of oral imparting and aural and vocal receptions of it led to even abstruse philosophy being presented in the form of aphorisms. Badarayana's sutras are the most authoritative system of Vedanta philosophy. They were formulated about the 2nd century B. C. And a full and proper exposition of this philosophical system was not forthcoming till the 8th or the 9th century A. D. Perhaps this lag in the development of knowledge may be due to this

fact of the learned tradition not being committed to writing and hence having to be learnt from the lips of a teacher and to be memorized. Even after the introduction of writing, for several centuries it was not utilized for lightening the burden of memory. The sacred character of the Vedic literature was also responsible for this state of affairs. Perhaps there was the fear that the sacred literature might pass into profane hands, if it was committed to writing. The Mahabharata condemns a writer of Vedas to hell. In the 8th or the 9th century A.D., Vasukra, an inhabitant of Kashmir, undertook the task of writing out the Veda because he was afraid that Veda itself would be lost if it was not committed to writing.¹⁴ Even then the traditional method of teaching was far from being given up. The view of Kumarila Bhatta, explicitly stated one or two centuries before, that "that knowledge of the truth is worthless which has been acquired from the Veda, if the Veda has not been rightly comprehended or if it has been learnt from writing,"¹⁵ still held the field. Learning committed to memory was of the greatest use, at a sacrifice, in a school or assembly but not so the learning

acquired from written books. This sentiment is supported by other ideas regarded as truths or rational principles. Prof. Altekar quotes a verse as from Paniniya-siksha¹⁶ in which a person who knows not the meaning and one who reads what is written are regarded as lowest of readers and reciters. Thus reading is regarded as low. Another verse quoted by Prof. Altekar as from Narada Smṛti¹⁷ upholds the same sentiment of the ancients. It proclaims the desire to listen to the contents of a book to be as much of a hindrance to acquisition of learning as sloth and sleepiness. Another statement quoted by Prof. Altekar as from Narada¹⁸ more explicitly states that book learning should not be encouraged. The knowledge that is acquired from books and not received from a teacher does not shine in a deliberative assembly i. e. is not operative and fruitful. Slightly different sentiment expressed in a popular verse¹⁹ emphasizing the need to memorize knowledge to keep it ready for all occasions decries book-learning through an analogy. Book - learning which is not memorized is like wealth in the possession of others. Both are equally useless when occasion

for their use arises. This does not discourage much less condemn acquisition of knowledge from books, yet in stressing the need to memorize it for keeping it at the tip of one's tongue, it decries dependence on books. Needless to say, in such an atmosphere a library could have little chance of being viewed as the repository of learned tradition. The memories of the learned men instead of libraries were its storehouses. This is not to say that there were no books or collections of books or that individuals did not enhance their knowledge through books as will be clear in the sequel but only to stress the adverse nature of the atmosphere for writing and gathering of books. Even so late as the 12th century A.D., "the highest ambition of an author.....was not that his work may adorn the shelves of libraries of the learned but that it may shine as an ornament on their neck i.e. it should be memorized by them."²⁰

It is really remarkable how so vast a literature has been preserved merely by memorizing till the art of writing came to be employed for the purpose. The ancients sought to preserve the learned tradition

through practically immaterial agency namely the human mind which was the repository of learned tradition. And this oral tradition was so well established a habit that for a long time the substitution of any other method would not suggest itself as necessary. The learned tradition was preserved by an unbroken succession of teachers. That is why perhaps it was customary to keep and repeat the names of teachers of a school of thought or learning. In ancient India they were the "living" or "walking" or "moving" libraries. Every literary man or teacher was, so to say, himself a library. There was widest possible diffusion of learning through these walking libraries thus insuring it from the destructive effects of physical forces and political causes.

Written Records

As the literary output became voluminous some individuals saw the need for resorting to some other method or a method in addition to memorizing for its preservation. Though, so far as sacred literature was concerned, for centuries people were not prepared to admit any other mode of preserving than oral tradition, in the case of other literature, which was multiplying rapidly, they were prepared to use another method for preserving it than allow it to get lost. The people were familiar with the art of writing and they thought of adopting it for the preservation of learned tradition. A few centuries after the Christian era the art of writing was gradually begun to be used for literary purposes. That does not mean that oral instruction and oral tradition was given up in the case of literature other than sacred. The old sentiment was firmly fixed and it did not die out easily. Hiuen Tsang (Yuan Chwang), the Chinese traveller, who visited

India in the 7th century A.D., records that instruction was imparted orally. Oral instruction and oral tradition played an important part till about the 11th or 12th century A.D. i.e. for a long time after the introduction of writing for literary purposes. Memorizing was still prized and used for diffusion and preservation of learning. The story of the rise of the Navadvipa (Nadia) school of Logic in Bengal is a fine example of the part memory and oral tradition played, even as late as the 15th century A. D., in the preservation of learned tradition in India. Vasudeva Sarvabhauma, the founder of the Navadvipa school, completing his study of the Upanisads at Banaras, went to Mithila for further studies under the guidance of Pakshadhara Misra. Pakshadhara Misra had in his possession the only manuscript of the best work on Logic namely "Chintamani" by Gangesa. He imposed a condition on his students that they were not to transcribe any copy of the work in order that the Mithila college may retain its monopoly of imparting instruction in Logic. Vasudeva however committed to memory the four parts of "Chintamani" and valuable interpretations and commentaries of Paksha-

dhara and went to Navadvipa and established there a school which outrivalled Mithila college as a centre of learning.²¹ Thus spread of learning, and consequently its preservation, was achieved by oral tradition even when writing was used for the purpose.

It need not be pointed out that in the early period of writing, printing was not invented and so copying had to be done by hand. Even writing was not an easy task for a good few centuries, for the materials to write were far from being the convenient ones that we are fortunate to possess today. Though leaves and bark of trees, wood, and metal were used as writing materials, the palm-leaves were the most often used throughout the greater part of India. The leaves of the palm trees were dried, boiled and again dried and smoothed with stones or shells. The characters were either incised with a style and then lamp black or some such thing was rubbed into them or they were written in ink. The former method was prevalent in Southern India and the latter in the North and part of Central India. Wooden boards covered the front and back of a book of palm-leaves. And generally a string

was passed through the holes bored through the book. According to Macdonell, the first example of a palm-leaf Sanskrit MS. belongs to the sixth century A. D. But Barnett states "probably the oldest books of the kind are those which survive in the fragments brought home by the Prussian Expeditions from Turfan: the morsels of dramas published by Dr. Luders in pt. i of his *Kleinere Sanskrit Texte* can hardly be later than second century A. D. A volume of the *Prajna-paramita* found by Sir M. A. Stein in Tun huang is perhaps to be assigned to the fourth century."²²

The inner bark of birch tree smoothened and fastened together in layers was employed for writing first in the North-West and later in Central, Eastern and Western India. The strips of bark, which were used as leaves of book, were cut to an oblong shape and kept together in the same way as the palm-leaves. The oldest birch bark MSS. are the Bower MSS; which were acquired by Lieutenant Bower in 1889 in Eastern Turkestan.²³ They are a collection of medical treatises. They are assigned to the latter half of the fourth century or the fifth century A. D.

In addition to these wooden boards, cotton cloth and stone were sometimes employed as writing materials. There are indications that the Hindus used varnished wooden boards for literary purposes. According to Winternitz, the Bodleian library possesses a MS. on wooden boards, which comes from Assam.²⁴ Manuscripts written on well-beaten cotton cloth were discovered at Jesalmir and Anhilvad Patan. The characters were written on cotton cloth with chalk or steatite pencils and the writing is white or black. There are some instances of large literary works having been engraved on stone as, for example, the large fragments of plays by the Cahamana king, Vighraha IV., and by his poet-laureate Somadeva at Ajmir, or the Jain Sthalapurana in a number of 'sargas' at Bijholli (Rajputana).²⁵ Scriptural texts were sometimes inscribed on plates of gold and silver. Sometimes copper plates were used for literary purposes.

Paper was introduced in India by the Muslims and since then it has been extensively used as writing material. The oldest paper MS. is from Gujarat which is said to date from 1223-24 A. D.²⁶

The copying or writing*on these materials was principally done by monks and priests. They were the principal copyists of ancient works, and the principal preservers of Indian literature during the last ten or fifteen hundred years. The priests and monks with their disciples undertook the work of copying in temples, monasteries and maths. As for copying of manuscripts for the public is concerned, work was principally done by poor Brahmans and by men of the caste known as Kayasthas. There grew up a class of professional writers. The oldest name of these men is 'lek'haka'. Another name of the professional writer is 'lipikara' or 'libikara'. In the 'toles' the students themselves were the principal copyists. Many Jain MSS. were copied by monks or novices and even by nuns. Among the copyists of the Buddhist MSS. were Bhiksus and Vajracaryas.

As a class the copyists were not necessarily men of learning yet they copied the manuscripts with fair accuracy. There is not much information available on the question of actual copying of manuscripts. But from whatever information available, it can be said that the

work of copying was done with great care; and the copyists made a good job of it. Dr. Buhler in his *Indian Paleography* says, "the lines of the MSS. are always regular"²⁷ There was also an attempt at ornamentation and illustration. Generally the manuscripts had at the beginning and at the end highly ornamental forms of the sacred syllable 'Om'. Jain manuscripts from Gujarat are a fine example of well illustrated and illuminated manuscripts. Among the manuscripts discovered at Patan there are some illustrated ones.²⁸ Among the Brahmanical manuscripts too there are some illuminated ones.

As manuscripts began to be copied, gradually libraries or collections of these MSS. began to grow. A library was styled as "Bharatibhandagara" (treasury of the goddess of speech) or Saraswatibhandagara. The libraries or collections became the repositories of manuscripts. They came into existence in temples and monasteries (matha, vihara, sangharana, upasraya), educational institutions and organizations, the palaces of kings and courts of princes, and private houses of the rich and the scholars. Thus priests and

monks, teachers, kings and princes and private individuals with literary tastes became the preservers of the learned tradition.

In the temples was preserved chiefly literature on Hinduism. In the Viharas and Upasrayas was preserved the literature chiefly on Buddhism and Jainism respectively. Educational institutions like universities and colleges (Vidyamatha) 'ghatikas' and 'toles' maintained collections of manuscripts. Educational organizations like the Parishads had their collections too. These educational institutions and organizations generally were strong in respect of manuscripts on the subject taught or discussed at the places. In the palaces of kings and in the private collections were preserved manuscripts in the field of literature in general. Libraries at this time were not only collecting and storing manuscripts but were also producing manuscripts as they were re-copying worn out manuscripts and copying manuscripts for the general public.

Manuscripts written on palm-leaves and birch-bark and even on paper were usually

kept between strips of wood cut according to the size of the leaves. Generally holes were pierced through the covers, through which long strings are passed. These strings are wound round the covers and knotted. Then, sometimes these manuscripts were wrapped up in coloured, occasionally embroidered cloths. In Jain libraries the palm-leaf MSS. were sometimes kept in bags of white cotton cloth and again they were fitted into small boxes of white metal. In general manuscripts were preserved in wooden or cardboard boxes. It was particularly so in royal courts and monasteries. In the monasteries the boxes were frequently opened, the MSS. were aired and dried. In general in accordance with religious practice manuscripts were cleared of their worms and dusted at least once a year namely at the time of the Dasara festival, when they had to be worshipped as representatives of Saraswati, goddess of learning. In the houses of the rich generally manuscripts were kept on shelves in bundles in a dry room especially assigned for the purpose. In the 'toles' in Bengal the manuscripts were usually placed on bamboo frames. In Kashmir, following Muslim usage the MSS.

were bound in leather and they were put on shelves like the modern books.

Note: M. Rama Rao has mentioned in his article on libraries in Ancient and Medieval India in the Journal of the Andhra Historical Research Society Vol. VII, a Sanskrit work namely Bhaskara Samhita as giving some details of the organization of libraries in ancient times. I have been unable to get this work and I am unable to say anything about its contents.

Care was also taken to secure, especially paper manuscripts, from silver-fish damp and vermin. In Bengal particularly manuscripts of country paper were sized with yellow arsenic and an emulsion of tamarind seeds. The arsenic effectually served to keep off insects. A religious practice of the Hindus came to help the preservation of manuscripts. At least once a year namely during the Dasara festival manuscripts were required to be dusted and cleared of any worms. Dr. Buhler in his Indian Paleography, while discussing the preservation of manuscripts, writes:- "Burnell's remarks regarding the bad treatment of MSS. by the Brahmans, do not hold good for the whole of

India, perhaps not even for the whole of Southern India. In Gujarat, Rajputana and the Maratha country, as well as in Northern and Central India, I have seen besides some ill-kept collections, very carefully preserved libraries in the possession of Brahmans and Jaina monks."²⁹

Thus a few centuries after the Christian era a part of the learned tradition began to be committed to writing; and the manuscripts were preserved with care in libraries or collections in temples and monasteries, educational institutions etc. However we do not know exactly the extent of libraries or collections during this early period. We have definite evidence of some large and good collections or libraries which played a principal part in the preservation of learned tradition by carefully storing manuscripts.

Fa-Hien, the Chinese traveller who visited India at the beginning of the 5th century A.D., records the Jetavana monastery near Pataliputra as a centre for higher Buddhist education. Here there were libraries and reading rooms. The libraries were equipped not only with Buddhist literature but also with

some non-Buddhist works and works on the arts and sciences which were taught at that time. Fa-Hien also refers to a monastery of the Greater Vehicle (a later form of Buddhism) in Central India. He obtained there copies of manuscripts of certain sacred texts. This means that there must have been a collection of manuscripts.

Nalanda, a village identified with modern Baragaon, 7 miles north of Rajgir in Bihar, began to assume importance as an educational centre in about 300 A. D. Here was built a monastery by Baladitya, king of Magadha. This developed into a monastic university from about 450 A. D. It was primarily a Buddhist centre of learning. However, in this university all subjects, Buddhist as well as non-Buddhist, were taught. Theology together with philosophy was a compulsory subject for all the students. The subject next in importance was logic. The university maintained a grand library. The quarter in which the Nalanda University with its library was located was known as Dharmaganja (Piety Mart). It was located in three grand buildings called Ratnasagara, Ratnodadhi and Ratnaranjaka.

In Ratnodadhi, a nine-storeyed building, there were sacred texts called Prajnaparamita-sutra, and Tantric works such as Samaja-guhya etc.³⁰ Epigraphical evidence shows that copying of manuscripts was one of the important activities of the students. There were also professional copyists. Besides these there were thousands of monks who regarded copying of the sacred works as part of their duty. An idea about the stock of manuscripts in this library can be got from the fact that many of the hundreds of manuscripts carried away by the Chinese travellers, Hiuen Tsiang and I-tsing, were copied by them at Nalanda. I-tsing got copied 400 Sanskrit works amounting to 500,000 verses. The manuscripts were well cared for and well preserved, as a few manuscripts copied here, that have still survived, show.

Historical evidence shows that the Valabhi University (Wala) in Saurashtra had a library. The Maitraka kings who ruled here from 480 to 775 A.D. were great patrons of learning. They used to give direct grants for strengthening its library. Valabhi monasteries also possessed libraries.

In the 7th century we have evidence of a private library. The work, namely Harsha-carita of Bana, famous Sanskrit poet who lived in the 7th century, shows that he must have possessed a large library. He had in his employment a reader of manuscripts (pustaka-vachaka).

From references made by the Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsiang we learn that in the 7th century A.D. many Buddhist centres of learning had collections of manuscripts. Jayendra monastery near the capital of Kashmir, Chinapati and Jallander monasteries in Punjab, Matipur monastery in Bijnor district, U.P., Bhadra monastery near Kanauj, a monastery in Hiranya country and another at Amraoti in Andhra country were notable centres of learning.³¹ Hiuen Tsiang stayed here for several months studying Buddhist works and getting them copied. We also learn from him that these monastic libraries were stocked only with Buddhist scriptures and their commentaries. In Kashmir there was also a library at the palace of the king. It must have been a well-equipped library as twenty clerks were employed to copy out the

MSS. Hiuen Tsiang wanted from its collection.

Another famous monastic University was at Vikramsila, identified with Patharaghat near Bhagalpur. The monastery was founded by king Dharmapala at the close of the 8th century. This monastery was also transformed into a monastic University. The University possessed a well-equipped and extensive library. The subjects taught were Theology, Philosophy, Logic etc. Tantra being quite prominent, the library was stocked with many works on it too. There were also great number of books on Hindu religion. Here also students and monks copied manuscripts.

From about the 10th century onwards we find evidence of Hindu temples becoming educational centres and collecting manuscripts. At Nagai near Wadi in Nizam's dominion there was a temple college. This college had a library which was known as Saraswati Bhandara. It employed six librarians.

About this time there was also a famous royal library namely that of King Bhoja of

Dhar (11th century A. D.). About the middle of the 12th century A. D., when this kingdom was conquered by Siddharaja Jayasimha the the royal library of Dhar was transferred to Anhilvad Patan, where it was amalgamated with the court library of the Chalukyas.

The Muslim rule was on the whole unfavourable to the preservation of Hindu and Buddhist learning. At least for a century or two after the Muslim conquerors set foot on Indian soil the existing learning was deprived of royal patronage which concerned itself with the promotion of Islamic learning. Some of the Muslim rulers and chiefs even destroyed the Brahman and Buddhist places of learning. For example, Bakhtiyar Khilji, Lieutenant of Qutubuddin (1206-1210), attacked and destroyed the monastic university of Bihar with its library. In spite of this, Hindu and Buddhist learning continued to flourish chiefly with the support of priests and monks and in private houses. In later times even some of the Muslim rulers and chiefs patronised Sanskrit. Sanskrit works were collected and translated into Persian and Arabic. This

helped the cause of Hindu and Buddhist learning.

There was a fine library in the temple of Nagarkot during the Tughluq dynasty. It consisted of 1300 Hindu works. Some of these works were translated under the orders of Firuz Tughluq (1351-1388).

Saraswati Bhandars

Libraries or collections noticed so far are some of those which are specifically recorded but there were many other temple and monastic and private collections besides these. These came to notice during the searches for manuscripts sponsored by the Government of India in the 19th and 20th centuries. Many small and large temple and monastic, private and royal libraries came to notice, some of them containing manuscripts 400 to 600 years old. It is indeed remarkable that notwithstanding influences of such factors as physical forces and political causes so many and such old manuscripts have been preserved with such care. Moreover, another fact to be noted is that "manuscripts from three to four hundred years old, existing in different parts of India,—in Bengal, Madras, Bombay and Kashmir—are so closely similar in their readings that they produce no suspicion in the mind of their having been tampered with."³²

The Indian people regarded their manuscripts as treasure, and in many temples, 'maths' and private houses they were actually worshipped. Such collections are scattered all over the country.

I subjoin below a brief list and a short description of MSS. libraries which came to notice during this search for MSS.

Bengal—In the Mymensing district were found large number of manuscripts of great age and great value collected in 'maths' and private houses. At Berhampur in Murshidabad district there was a private collection belonging to one Babu Ramadasa Sen containing rare works. At Nashipur another large private collection was noticed. It comprised complete copies of nearly all the Puranas and most of the Upapuranas. There was also another library which was attached to the Ramanuja Math of Mahant Gopaladasa. It was found to contain two hundred manuscripts including several rare works.

The largest collection of Jain MSS. in Bengal was discovered at Azimganj near Murshidabad. The Jain communities there

maintained several monasteries which had collections of religious works of some value. Besides these there appear to have been many other private collections. An individual by name Rai Dhanapat Singh alone had a collection of 600 works of considerable extent and value which were well cared for.

At Nadia there were some libraries containing rare works. That of the Raja of Krishnanagar yielded large number of Tantra works. At Santipur large number of learned Brahmans possessed manuscripts. One of the Pandits owned a collection of over thousand, many of them being rare and a few of them unique. The 'Gosains' of this place were known for their collections. In the village of Simla close by Santipur there were collections including Tantra works. In the village of Ula in this district in the house of one Babu Annadaprasada Mukarji there were three hundred manuscripts which were very old and were written on the bark of the 'agaru' tree. A Pandit of the place also had a collection of six hundred manuscripts.

In the Pabna district in the villages of Jayade, Sulukha, Nurnagar, Hendel and

Sthala there were a few Pandits who owned manuscripts. Janakinath Gosain at Sthala had many Vaishnavite works. Some of the 'maths' in this district had very old and rare manuscripts.

In Dacca there were some collections owned by Pandits. None appear to have been noteworthy.

In Bankura and Burdwan in Bengal and Gaya in Bihar and Shahabad and Chaora in the United Provinces there were about fifty collections of manuscripts. Private collection was the chief feature of the Burdwan district. A person named Babu Hitalala Misra of Manakara had a very choice collection of works, including a great number of very rare treatises on the Vedanta. In Begune village there was a private collection of Smṛti works.

Serampur college in Hoogly had a small but valuable collection of manuscripts. A few 'toles' too were found owning manuscripts. Numerous 'toles' on the left bank of the river Hoogly and at Harinabhi contained many old and rare works. In the 24 Purgunnahs several zamindars had good collections of Tantra

works and Puranas. At Calcutta there were some large private collections.

In some villages in the Birbhum district there were small private collections containing very old manuscripts, as for example at Hitampur. In the village of Kenduli there was a collection of about 200 manuscripts in an old chest in the monastery of Jayadeva. There was also a private collection containing about a hundred manuscripts mostly very old and written either on palm-leaves or on the bark of the 'agaru'. In Gopalpura were found upwards of three hundred medieval works. In Bhimghar there were about two hundred manuscripts. A private library in Karidha contained about two hundred manuscripts.

Note—This section is compiled from information contained in the following books:

Mitra, Rajendralala

- 1) *Notices of Sanskrit MSS. Vol. II*
- 2) " " " " " *V*
- 3) " " " " " *IX*

Shastri, Haraprasad

- 1) *Notices of Sanskrit MSS. Vol. X*

2) *Report on the Search for Sanskrit Manuscripts 1901-1902 to 1905-1906.*

Orissa—'Maths' at Puri had collections of manuscripts, most important of these being in the Sankara 'math', which had about two thousand manuscripts.

Bihar—Large number of manuscripts were discovered at Gaya, Arrah, Patna and Darbhanga. At Gaya the Hindu 'math' owned by Pandit Hemanatha Giri had a collection of over three hundred manuscripts well preserved in a pukka house. A fact to be noted about this collection is that there was a catalogue of the works. A Jain 'math' at Arrah was noted for a collection of Jain manuscripts. It was said to have possessed upwards of six hundred of them. In the city of Patna the Maharaja of Dumraon had a large collection of MSS., many of them being important works.

There were some important private collections at Darbhanga. The library of the Hon'ble Maharaja Lachhmisvar Sinha contained about two hundred manuscripts. In the library of Pandit Kanayi Jha, the court

Pandit of the Maharaja, was found a select collection of manuscripts. He had another collection comprising of seven hundred manuscripts of great value in his house at Magrani. Babu Jhanjha at Ujana was said to have a very large collection. Some other Pandits of this place had fairly extensive collections containing works chiefly on Nyaya, Smṛti and Kavya.

Note—This section is compiled from information contained in the following books :

Mitra, Rajendralala

Notices of Sanskrit MSS. Vol. V

Shastri, Haraprasad

Report on the search for Sanskrit Manuscripts 1901-1902 to 1905-1906.

United Provinces—In the collections at Gorakhpore were discovered works on almost all branches of knowledge. Detailed information regarding places where manuscripts were discovered is not available.

In Oudh, manuscripts were preserved by learned Pandits who preserved or collected them for study. Also illiterate persons pre-

served manuscripts considering it to be a sacred treasure. Most of the manuscripts found here were written on paper and they were generally kept in a box known as 'pitara'.

Two important libraries were found in the city of Banaras, that of the Maharaja of Banaras and that of the Guruswami 'math'. The Maharaja's library was situated in the fort of Ramanagar. The manuscripts were housed in fine rooms on the first floor. There was a subject catalogue of the works. The care of the manuscripts was taken by a Librarian. This collection yielded some rare Buddhist manuscripts. The collection at the Guruswami 'math' was large, consisting mostly of the works on the Vedanta school of philosophy. Some of the manuscripts were rare. Most of the manuscripts in this collection were copied in the saka years 1724 and 1731.

Rajputana—In Rajputana there were and are even to-day many famous court or state libraries and also private libraries. The state collection at Jaipur is of great antiquity. The collection was built from the time of Raja Man Sinh (latter part of the 16th century).

Some very rare manuscripts were collected in this library.

The state collection at Alwar was well cared for, the manuscripts being kept in proper order. There were also a few private collections.

In a fortress at Hanumangad or Bhatner about 1872 there was a room, ten or twelve feet long and about six feet broad, half filled with manuscripts. The manuscripts were wrapped in red cloth and were piled one on another to a height of about four feet. There was another large library containing about 800 paper manuscripts.

The manuscripts in the library of the Maharaja of Bikaner were well preserved and well arranged. It contained about fourteen hundred manuscripts, a dozen or two being rare and a few unique. There were manuscripts of the Vedas and works on Dharma-sastra or sacred law, Sangita or the art of singing and dancing and Mantra. There seemed to have been some sort of classificatory arrangement of the manuscripts. The bundles of manuscripts were arranged according

to Sastras or sciences. Besides this there were about 16 other collections of manuscripts more or less big Jain collections, and some private collections by Brahmans. The Jain collections were very well preserved and in good order. Some of these were considerably large and contained very old manuscripts. One collection contained manuscripts of about 500 years old. Of the collections by Brahmans only a few were of any importance.

Jaisalmir was famous for the great Jain Bhandars and private collections of manuscripts. Ten Bhandars and collections were discovered here. They are:

- 1) The bada (big) Bhandar of the Jains underneath the Sambhavnatha temple (in a dark underground cellar).
- 2) The Bhandar belonging to the Acharyagachchha (sect).
- 3) The Bhandar in the big Upasraya of the Kharataragachchha.
- 4) The collection in the house of Thirusaha.
- 5) The Bhandar in the Upasraya of the Tapagachchha.

- 6) The Bhandar in the Upasraya of the Lonkagachchha.
- 7) The collection belonging to the Talotike Vyasas.
- 8) The state Bhandar in the Akshayavilasa palace.
- 9) The collection belonging to Yati Dungsinghji.
- 10) The collection belonging to the Vastapila Purohita.

Jain* 'Upasrayas' or places of worship had libraries attached to them. They were often named after the 'pado' or the street or the ward in which they were situated, as for example in Ahmedabad in the Bombay Province. But in the case of cities like Jaisalmer where there are not many streets or wards they are named after the Gachchha or sect of the Jains to which they belong.

"The first of the Bhandars in the above list Dr. Buhler in his Abstract Report for 1873-74 (Gough's Records, p. 117) speaks of as being under the temple of Parisnath. But it is really underneath the temple of Sambhavanatha, the two temples being so built as to

touch one another and to appear to be but two parts of one temple.”³³ It contained about 2,200 manuscripts. The manuscripts were of classical Sanskrit poems, of works on Brahmanical ‘sastras’ and also of some rare Jain works. They are very ancient and written on palm-leaves, and date from the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The oldest of these bears the date Samvat 924. There are also paper manuscripts. Each palm-leaf manuscript (containing one work or more) was first tied between wooden boards, then put in a cloth bag; and a number of such bags were rolled up in a thick piece of cloth. Finally the bundle was again tied with a string. The bundles were kept in stone cases suited to the length of the bundle which varied. The collection had a catalogue, 120 years old.

There were two Jain collections at Nagaur in Jodhpur territory. They were small collections. One of them contained ordinary Jain scriptures and commentaries. There was also a small private collection with a Brahman. It contained ordinary manuscripts.

At Jodhpur there was the extensive state library. It contained about 1800 Sanskrit

manuscripts. Besides these there was a large collection of printed Sanskrit books and several hundred manuscripts in modern vernaculars, chiefly in Hindi and Marwari. The library was rich in rare Puranas, Mahatmyas and Tantras.

In Udaipur there were some valuable collections, the biggest of these being the state collection. It was well preserved and in good order. The manuscripts were kept on open shelves. They were listed. As regards the other collections, one private Jain collection and another in a Jain Bhandar were very well preserved. Two or three of these collections also had lists.

At Rajgarh there were four small collections. Two of these were extremely well preserved.

Two small but good collections were found at Indore.

Note:—This section is compiled from information contained in the following books.

Bhandarkar, Shridhar R.

Report of a Second Tour in Search of Sanskrit Manuscripts made in Rajputana and Central India in 1904-5 and 1905-6.

Gough, Archibald Edward (ed.)

*Papers Relating to the Collection and
Preservation of the Records of Ancient
Sanskrit Literature in India.*

Central India—At Ujjain there were about fourteen collections.³⁴ One of these contained very old manuscripts but it was not very well kept. Another collection was in a Jain ‘upasraya’. Two other collections contained very old manuscripts.

Bombay Presidency—In the Province of Bombay Sanskrit learning was cultivated at Bhuj, Rajkot, Gondal, Junagad, Limdi, Bhavnagar, Dholka, Wadhvan, Patan, Ahmedabad, Nadiad, Cambay, Baroda, Broach and Balsar. There were Jain and Brahmanical collections at these places.

At Bhuj there was a private collection which belonged to one Bhattarakji Jivankul. It contained 614 manuscripts, one of which was a copy of the rare Jain work Mahanisithasutra. The collection was rich in works on Alankara ‘sastra’ and also contained a large amount of Kacchi-Gujarati poetry. His Highness the Rao

of Bhuja also had a collection. It contained some rare works.

Limdi, Wadhvan, Patan, Ahmedabad and Cambay were rich in Jain collections. Particularly at Wadhvan, Patan and Ahmedabad there were large Bhandars. Patan contained the following Jain collections or Bhandars:—

- 1) Bhandar of Pophlianopado which belonged to the Tapagachchha.
- 2) Another smaller Bhandar in the same ward which belonged to the Tapagachchha.
- 3) Bhandar of Bhabhanopado which belonged to the Vimalagachchha.
- 4) Bhandar of Samghavinopado.
- 5) Bhandar of Rajavijaya Dayavijaya.
- 6) Bhandar of Limrinopado.
- 7) Bhandar of Vadi Parsvanatha Mandira.
- 8) Bhandar of Rupasagarji.
- 9) Bhandar of Ratanvijaya, Khetarsi Mahal.
- 10) Bhandar of Makamodi Vania.
- 11) Bhandar of Svarupachandra Yati.

Some of these Bhandars date from the time of the Chalukya kings.

The Pophlianopado Bhandar contained 2,801 manuscripts. These were stored in 80 boxes or 'dabdas' mostly made of thick paperboards. In each box there was a list of its contents.

The smaller Bhandar at Pophlianopado was formed of several collections of different individuals. There were large boxes which contained small boxes in which the manuscripts lay. In one large box there were 17 smaller 'dabdas'. Twelve of these boxes contained manuscripts which belonged to one Santidasa Devakarana. Remaining five boxes contained manuscripts which belonged to three other individuals. Besides these the same large box contained 19 manuscripts written on 'tala' leaves and four more written on paper. In another box, a smaller one, there were fourteen 'dabdas'. These contained manuscripts which belonged to one individual named Satyavijayanyasa. There were three more boxes which contained manuscripts belonging to different individuals.

The Bhabanopado collection was preserved in the upasraya of the Vimalagachchha. The collection consisted of 27 boxes or 'dabdas', containing upwards of 300 paper manuscripts. There was one manuscript written on 'tala' leaves. The collection had a general catalogue.

In the Samghavinopado Bhandar some very valuable manuscripts were found. It contained three boxes with nearly 500 manuscripts. All the manuscripts were written on 'tala' leaves.

The Hemachandra's Bhandar contained about 600 to 700 manuscripts filled in forty boxes.

At Patan there were also three collections of Brahmanical works. One of them was owned by one Jasvantrai Gopalrai who belonged to the Ramanuja sect. His collection contained many valuable works of the Ramanuja school and Smrtis. The second collection belonged to Manisamkara Krpasamkara, follower of Sankaracarya's school. In his collection were found many works of the Sankaracarya school.

An important fact to be noted about the Patan collections is that there were some very old palm-leaf manuscripts. The oldest of these was of 1062 A. D. and about 20 were written between 1062 and 1224 A. D.

The chief collections at Ahmedabad belonged to the Jains. Following were the important Jain Bhandars:

- 1) Bhandar of Dehalano Upasraya.
- 2) Bhandar of Daya Vimala.
- 3) Lohvarni polanum Bhandar.
- 4) Mulchandji's Bhandar.
- 5) Jaysing Hathesing's Bhandar.
- 6) Premabhai Hemabhai's Bhandar.
- 7) Bhandar of the Tapagachchha.

The Bhandar of Daya Vimala contained 53 'dabdas'.

In the Bhandar of the Tapagachchha there were 26 'dabdas' containing 887 manuscripts. All the manuscripts were written on paper. There were "copies of the usual stock works of Jaina libraries—the Angas with their commentaries....., the numerous charitras, Rasas,

Sejjhais and chopais, descriptive of the lives or composed in honour, of Jaina saints and a small number of Brahmanical works’’³⁵ on Alankarasāstra and poetry. There were also a few rare works.

A Brahman had a small collection in Nadiad. It contained some rare works like commentaries on the Natakas and some important works on grammar.

Note:—This section is compiled from information contained in the following books:

Bhandarkar, Ramkrishna Gopal.

Report on the Search of Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Bombay Presidency during the year 1883-84.

Gough, Archibald Edward (ed.)

Paper Relating to the Collection and Preservation of the Records of Ancient Sanskrit Literature in India.

Mysore—The Library of His Highness the Maharaja of Mysore styled as Saraswati Bhandaram Library, contained about 608 works, large number of which were valuable.

Madras—Of the 281 public and private libraries discovered in the Madras Presidency about 253 were in the Godavari district and about 27 in the districts of Vizagapatam, Krsna, Malabar, Tanjore and Chingleput. A number of these were large collections in which manuscripts were kept in very good condition while a few collections were insignificantly small. The collections in the Amalapuram taluka and Tanjore were particularly large. Many of the collections were open for public use. In the 276 collections (excluding the collections at Tanjore) there were about 18000 manuscripts. They were works in Sanskrit as well as in the vernacular, namely Telugu. The Sanskrit works were in the field of Vedic ritual, philosophy, Smṛti, dramas, poetry and poetics, astronomy and medicine. Manuscripts of Telugu poetry and prose formed the chief vernacular literature.

The palace library at Tanjore contained several good manuscripts of all the most important Sanskrit works. "The total number of manuscripts amounted to upwards of 18000 and these in eleven distinct alphabets, being from all parts of India."³⁶ There were numer-

ous manuscripts of the Mahabharata and Ramayana. It was about 300 years collection, being founded by Nayaks of Tanjore towards the end of the 16th century or early 17th century. The activity was continued and additions were made after about 1675 by the Maratha princes. The library was enriched in about 1830 by Raja Sarfoji by the addition of a large number of manuscripts which were collected at Banaras. Thus it is known as Maharaja Sarfoji's Saraswati Mahal library. At Tanjore there was one important private collection, that of the Maratha Brahman named Jambunathabhatta. In this collection there were a large number of manuscripts evidently copied in Northern India, the rest being transcribed by the learned members of the family. The manuscripts were tied in bundles in cloth. There were more than 100 such bundles. There were also four other private collections at Tanjore. Two of these in the villages of Tiruvisanellur and Veyaluru contained about 180 and 200 manuscripts respectively. In the Mahalingasvamin temple at Tiruvidaimarudur in Tanjore there was a library containing about 300 manuscripts.

Note:—This section is compiled from the information contained in the following books:

Sastrigal, M.R. RY.S. Kuppuswami
Search for Oriental Manuscripts.

Gough, Archibald Edward (ed.)
Papers Relating to the Collection and
Preservation of the Records of Ancient
Sanskrit Literature in India.

Hultzsch, E.
Reports on Sanskrit Manuscripts in
Southern India No. II

Reports on Sanskrit Manuscripts in Sou-
thern India No. III.

These were some of the collections which were discovered during the search for manuscripts. The noteworthy fact is that the Government in ordering the search of the collections of manuscripts had no other object than their preservation. The collections have been denuded of their manuscripts many of which have found a safe asylum in the great libraries of Europe and India. In Europe, particularly in Great Britain, many Sanskrit manuscripts have found their way into the Bodleian at Oxford, the library of the Trinity College, Cambridge, the

University library, Cambridge, Edinburgh University library, and the Library of the now defunct India Office, and the great British Museum. It is estimated that in the Bodleian library alone nearly 10,000 Sanskrit manuscripts are stored. In addition to these there are several other collections of Sanskrit manuscripts in the libraries in European capitals as for example Paris and Berlin.

In India the libraries of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, the Banaras Sanskrit College, the Deccan College, Poona, Madras University and number of others have collected large number of manuscripts. "Practically the whole of this vast mass of manuscripts representing Sanskrit literature has been made accessible through catalogues compiled by the directions of librarians in Europe or by the order of the Indian Government".³⁶

Thus India preserved her valuable and voluminous learned tradition in spite of social changes, religious turmoils and foreign invasions. For about 2500 to 3000 years in the age of pre-manuscripts and pre-libraries, the work of preservation was magnificently achieved by the memories of the ancients.

When learned tradition began to be committed to writing and manuscripts were being produced, libraries became its repositories. It must be noted that the libraries which did this work of storing the manuscripts were in some ways different from the modern libraries. Their primary aim was storing the learned tradition by stocking the manuscripts with great care and facilitating reproduction of worn-out manuscripts. They also promoted the endeavour of copying new manuscripts. And though many of the libraries were open to the public, they were primarily used by Pandits and learned men. It may be due to this that there was conspicuous absence of proper catalogues. As the primary users of libraries were the Pandits just elementary lists of the type discovered in some of the libraries served the purpose. The main concern of the libraries was to serve as the store-houses and this they successfully carried out. Thus the memories of the ancients and libraries preserved the learned tradition in India in a remarkable manner.

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